

5. A CONSERVATION PLEA FOR SAVING WILDLIFE IN THE LANDSCAPE BOUND BY GOLA, LADHIYA AND SHARADA RIVERS, NORTH INDIA

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One of the scenic, neglected but promising landscapes for large mammals in India is in the eastern part of Uttarakhand. This landscape spreading over an area of nearly 1,200 sq. km includes the entire Haldwani Forest Division (FD) comprising of Nandhour, Danda, North Jaulasal, Chhakata and Sharada forest ranges; the Dogari and Boom forest ranges of Champawat FD and Kishanpur, Ransali, Jaulasal south and Kilpura ranges of Terai East FD (Fig. 1). Abutting ranges of Champawat FD (Bhingrada and Champawat) and Bharon range of Nainital FD, just north of Ladhiya and Gola rivers, are not included in this conservation planning though they are contiguous to the landscape. Those who have trekked here would concur with us that the mountainous parts of this landscape (Haldwani and Champawat FDs) are the most beautiful locales in the entire outer Himalayan range. Corbett (1944, 1954) has written about this hilly region in his accounts on Chowgarh tigers, Talla-Des, Chuka and Thak man-eaters. We had the pleasure of walking 130 km across this landscape: 60 km from Manch to Thuligad via Chuka and Thak in December 2005 and 70 km from Dalkania (Chowgarh tigers were shot here) to Chorgalia and Kalonia in January 2006. This landscape was once part of a much wider continuous landscape that existed all along the foot-hills of Himalaya (Toovey 1987). Isolation of this landscape was as a result of uncontrolled boulder mining in Gola river, townships, encroachments and other developments in the terai part of the landscape.

Based on these walks, plus the earlier Terai tiger surveys carried out by the Wildlife Institute of India in this landscape (Johnsingh *et al.* 2004), and the information we gathered from the forest staff during our treks, we conclude that the status of three endangered species – Golden Mahseer *Tor putitora*, Elephant *Elephas maximus* and Tiger *Panthera tigris* – is extremely critical here. During our 130 km trek, although we saw eight leopard *P. pardus* and six sloth bear *Melursus ursinus* tracks, we did not see a single tiger sign.

During the Terai tiger survey, covering the entire area of all the three divisions (c. 1,800 sq. km) we had walked 147 km along river beds, covering almost all potential tiger

forest ranges, looking for tiger, leopard and prey signs. The number of different tiger pug marks seen was 34 and leopard 49, which gives an encounter rate of 0.23 tiger pug marks/km and 0.33 leopard pug marks/km, respectively. In comparison, 18.8 km walk in the four river beds in the southern part of Corbett Tiger Reserve (TR) yielded 21 tiger pug marks (1.1 pug marks/km) and two leopard pug marks (0.01/km; Johnsingh *et al.* 2004).

Poaching of ungulate prey by the Nepalese and the people of this landscape, as well as outsiders, particularly by the *Rai Sikhs* (who come from the *terai*, the fertile landscape south of the foot-hills, and hereafter called the Terai Poachers), is the major reason for the rarity of tiger in this landscape of enormous potential. While poaching by the local people and the Terai Poachers still continues, the illegal activities by the Nepalese have been contained to a great extent since 2003, after the deployment of Special Security Bureau forces along Sharada river with the specific purpose of curtailing incursions by the Maoists from Nepal. Related to tiger conservation, poaching by the Terai Poachers is extremely detrimental as they selectively kill Sambar *Cervus unicolor*, the most vital prey for tiger in the Asian forests, by using dogs and spears. Terai Poachers also indulge in other unlawful activities such as brewing and selling liquor in the forests, and occasionally waylaying villagers who transit through the forests carrying provisions. It is also reported that the Terai Poachers are responsible for the killing of most of the elephant tuskers in the area. Exploits of the Terai Poachers are largely for adventure and not driven by poverty. Presently, the status of the 40 or so elephants mostly confined to the south-eastern part of this landscape is extremely critical and it is one of the most precariously endangered sub-populations in the country. Other problems seen in this landscape are the widespread presence of cattle camps, use of destructive fishing methods (dynamites, gill nets and bleaching powder) in the Sharada, Nandhour and Ladhiya rivers, smuggling of timber and fire wood cutting along the southern portion of the landscape.

Yet the potential for the conservation of tiger and mahseer is extremely high, as the landscape has nearly

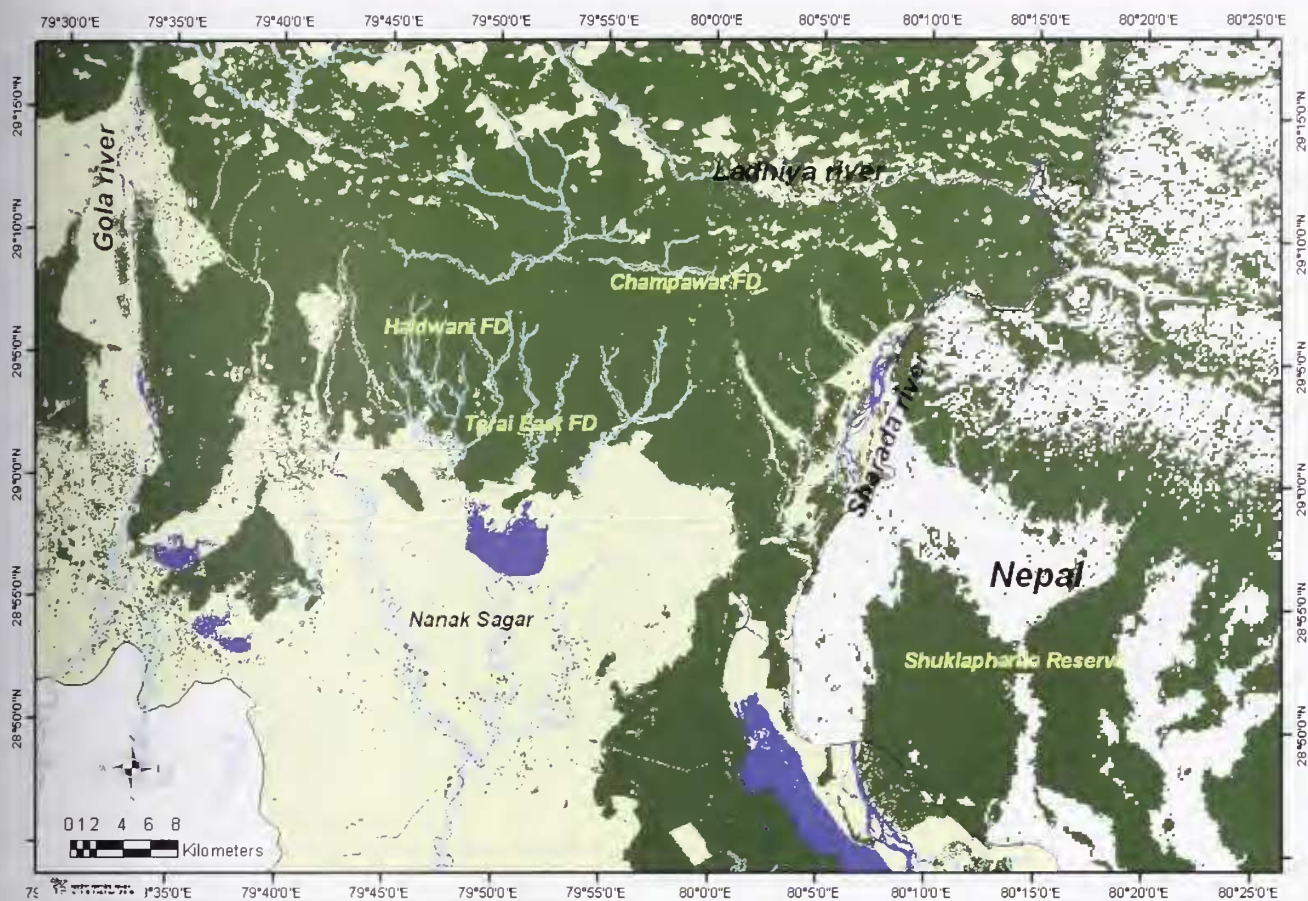


Fig. 1: The landscape bound by Gola, Ladhya and Sharada rivers

1,000 sq. km intact Sambar-Tiger habitat. The Nandhour river flows for 30 km through a valley with no permanent human settlements, the final 20 km of Ladhya between Chalti and its confluence with Sharada is sparsely populated and Sharada, beyond Chuka, flows for 20 km with only one cattle camp on the Indian side (opposite of the cattle camp on the Nepal side there is Parigaon village of 300-500 families). The area (Chakata range of Haldwani FD) has a weak connectivity with Ramnagar FD (Fatehpur range) and Nainital FD (Ranibagh range) which are connected with Corbett TR on the west. Sadly, the connectivity with Corbett TR across Terai Central, Ramnagar and Terai West FDs, which was seriously threatened by boulder mining in the past, seems to be totally broken now as a result of new developments such as the construction of Indian Oil Corporation Depo, Railway Sleeper Factory and allotment of 50 ha land to Indo-Tibetan Border Police for their campus development. There is still connectivity with the forests in Nepal across Sharada, and it appears that the continuity along the foot-hills beyond Sharada exists for about 20 km as Brahmadev corridor till the eastern part of Shuklaphanta Wildlife Reserve (Fig. 1). Surveys and immediate

conservation initiatives to protect the forests here are urgently needed. The conservation measures suggested for the landscape would also immensely benefit the elephants pocketed in this landscape, particularly the tuskers would be able to live longer and contribute to breeding. Thus, this landscape has immense value in securing the future of tiger and associated species in the *terai-bhabar* landscape which in India and Nepal sprawls over an area of *c.* 40,000 sq. km. We present this report to urge the stakeholders to start working towards the following objectives:

- Establish *c.* 1,000 sq. km Nandhour-Ladhya Conservation Reserve, which would encompass the Danda, Nandhour and Jaulasal (north) ranges of Haldwani FD, Dogari and Boom ranges of Champawat FD, Jaulasal (south) and Kilpura ranges of Terai East FD and other potential adjacent forest blocks (Fig. 2).

- Notify *c.* 400 sq. km as Nandhour Valley National Park including areas of Danda, Nandhour and Jaulasal (north), ranges of Haldwani FD as the core of the Conservation Reserve (which may be elevated to the level of a National Park or a Wildlife Sanctuary). Danda has human habitations only along its western and northern boundary,

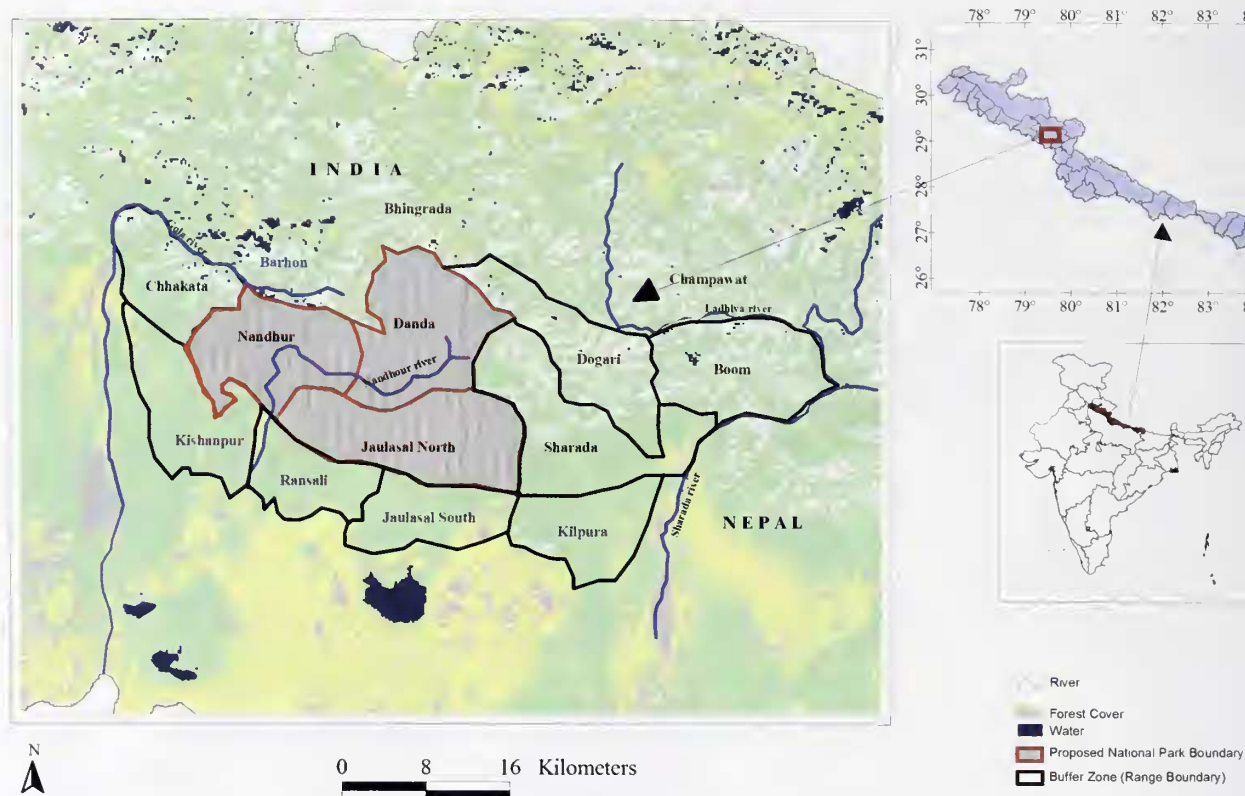


Fig. 2: Suggested Nandhour- Ladhiya Conservation Reserve with a core

and Nandhour only in the south. It is reported that Jaulasal does not have permanent settlements (Fig. 2).

- Facilitate the only family living in Thak to settle down in Chuka and vacate the cattle camp on the bank of Sharada so that minimum 50 sq. km of Boom range becomes free of human habitation. This area marked by the Purnagiri temple in the south, Chuka in the north, Sharada river in the east and Kotkendri in the west, can become a satellite mini-core of the suggested Park/WLS. Endangered Serow *Capricornis sumatraensis* is reported to occur here.

- Station a 50-person strong anti-poaching force of forest and police personnel along the southern boundary of the suggested Conservation Reserve, to patrol the forests, kill the dogs used in poaching, arrest the poachers and liquidate the liquor trade within the jungle. This protection force may have to continue for several years.

- Initiate a dialogue with the elders of the villages all along the southern boundary, from where the Terai Poachers are reported to come, so that the men from the villages would stop their illegal activities inside the forests. We should also recruit, motivate and train 12-15 Terai Poachers from these villages as part of the anti-poaching force. They can also be trained as ecotourism guides to take adventure tourists to trek

in this landscape. The villagers have a stake in protecting this landscape as water for their prosperous agriculture comes only from these mountains.

Spread the message of conservation in all the villages within and along the boundary of the Conservation Reserve (this should include villages in the immediate vicinity of Ladhiya on its north bank) about the need to give up poaching, and give sufficient financial incentives to grow fuel wood and fodder species on their lands so that pressures on the forests will be minimal. May be 500-1,000 m width of reserve forest all around the village, depending upon the size of the village, can be set aside for growing firewood and fodder.

- Conduct a socio-economic survey of all the villages in this landscape at the earliest, so that appropriate conservation programmes for every village could be initiated following a participatory approach.

- Conduct another absence/presence/abundance survey of tiger, leopard and wild ungulate signs in January-February, as done by Wildlife Institute of India between October 2002 and June 2003 (Johnsingh *et al.* 2004), and initiate a study to assess the population, range and habitat use of elephants in the landscape.

- While allowing people to catch fish for their use with line and hook, nooses (a widely used method in

Uttarakhand) and cast nets, ban destructive methods of fishing in Nandhour, Ladhiya and Sharada rivers to enable Mahseer to stage a come back.

■ Secure the support of Government of India, which has the responsibility to save the tiger through its National Tiger Conservation Authority, to establish Conservation Reserve and the National Park, which eventually, with some reintroduction, can support 30-50 tigers. As seen from the studies in the western part of Uttarakhand, in a similar habitat, the potential of this habitat to support high densities of wild ungulate prey is enormous (Harihar *et al.* 2008).

■ Long term plan for this promising landscape should include re-establishment of viable connectivity with Corbett TR and Suklaphanta Reserve.

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6. LARGE-TAILED NIGHTJAR *CAPRIMULGUS MACRURUS* IN PHULWARI-KI-NAAL WILDLIFE SANCTUARY, UDAIPUR DISTRICT, RAJASTHAN

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While we were birding in Asawara area of Mamer in Phulwari-ki-Naal Wildlife Sanctuary, Udaipur district, Rajasthan on March 29, 2004, a Large-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus macrurus* started calling *chaun... chaunk...chaunk...* at 18:44 hrs soon after sunset. Being familiar with the distinct knocking and resonant call of the species we had no difficulty in identifying the species.

Soon after we heard another bird calling some distance away from the first one: the birds stopped calling when we tried to find them. Possibly they were disturbed by the noise created by trampling of dry leaves lying on the ground. Later in the evening one bird was briefly heard at 20:30 hrs and another flying close to the forest rest house at Mamer.

With an average annual precipitation of *c.* 650 mm, Phulwari-ki-Naal harbours dry deciduous forest and some patches of moist deciduous biotopes. There is preponderance of stunted Teak *Tectona grandis* and Mahua *Madhuca indica* trees in some parts of the Sanctuary. When we visited the area the trees had shed their leaves and ground was covered with a thick carpet of dry leaves. The habitat at Asawara

seemed suitable for the species to breed as the species is known to breed from March to June “among dry leaves, often in rather open conditions” (Rasmussen and Anderton 2005).

Although apparently resident or a local migrant in much of its range, it is “only a summer visitor in some areas such as the Punjab Salt range (Ratray 1899: 342)” (Ali and Ripley 1983; Holyoak 2001).

The movements and distribution of the species “on western side south of sub-Himalayan Punjab (N. Maharashtra etc.)” are uncertainly known (Ali and Ripley 1983). It is sedentary and partially migratory, perhaps subject to some local movements (Cleere 1998). The species is known to be a summer breeding visitor in dry subtropical deciduous forest, but is confined to the Muree Hills eastwards to Kahuta (Grimmett *et al.* 2008).

Although it is difficult to comment about the status of the species in Phulwari-ki-Naal, it is certainly a new record for the area. We are not aware of any other sighting in Rajasthan except at Bharatpur (Kazmierczak and van Perlo 2000). Two new records of the species are from the